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Letter dated 2 October 2018 from the Permanent Representatives of Peru, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Peru and Sweden, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, hereby transmit the summary of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group held on 4 September 2018 on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Gustavo **Meza-Cuadra**
Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Olof **Skoog**
Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Karen **Pierce**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations

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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security

Summary of the meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 4 September 2018

On 4 September 2018, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security held a meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ahead of the visit by the Security Council in October 2018. The members received a briefing from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Leila Zerrougui, experts from the Mission and representatives of the country team. The Special Representative provided a comprehensive overview of key developments since the previous meeting and of progress and challenges in implementing commitments with regard to women and peace and security. She reaffirmed the Mission's commitment to advancing the women and peace and security agenda in collaboration with the Congolese partners and the country team.

Members asked questions related to women's low representation on candidates lists for the December 2018 elections, the continuing threats to and shrinking space for civil society organizations and human rights defenders, and the accountability of perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence, including through the sanctions regime. They also inquired about ongoing efforts to increase the gender-responsiveness of MONUSCO and sought input on key messages and concerns ahead of the visit by the Security Council to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in October 2018. Below are the main points raised in response to those questions.

- The participation and representation of women in government and decision-making bodies remains a challenge. Although half of all registered voters for the general elections in December 2018 are women, there is only one female presidential candidate and only approximately 12 per cent of candidates on national and provincial lists are women. These percentages are the same as in previous elections, but the lack of progress is discouraging to many Congolese women who are active in public life. The electoral law does not include quotas for women's representation, and women are often marginalized in political parties and are less likely to secure political and financial sponsors.

- In the absence of a quota, the United Nations advocated the inclusion of a voluntary commitment from parties in the code of conduct issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Nearly half of the political parties have signed this code of conduct, stressing their will to include women on their electoral lists, but this does not include the major parties.

- In the lead-up to the general elections in December 2018, the Mission and country team are prioritizing support for women candidates and voters. This includes plans for women's situation rooms that would be aimed at building the capacity of analysts to monitor the elections and of journalists to cover them with a gender perspective and in a non-discriminatory manner. The United Nations is already making preparations to increase women's participation in the next election cycle.

- Women continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict, for example through forced displacement, the loss of both livelihoods and male

family members and by their increased responsibilities in caring for victims of armed conflict. This has recently been compounded by women's exposure to Ebola, given their primary role as caregivers. Two thirds of those who have contracted Ebola in North Kivu are women.

- The number of conflict-related sexual violence cases in 2018 has increased compared with 2017. Conflict-related sexual violence is predominantly perpetrated by armed groups, militias and the security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to a lesser extent the national police.

- The Mission is supporting discussions between the Government and the Force de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri (FRPI) and has made it clear that they can support demobilization only if there is a commitment to ending sexual violence and no amnesty for perpetrators of sexual violence. MONUSCO also supported eight trials by mobile courts, involving 65 victims and resulting in 59 convictions against perpetrators of sexual violence, and has also increased the involvement of women in local protection mechanisms, including community alert networks. In some areas, 60 per cent of accurate alerts come from women. Gender advisers are also working with community liaison assistants and local communities to identify zones of high threat for women and girls. The inclusion of gender in risk mapping has increased the effectiveness and relevance of United Nations patrols for women and girls. Women affected by conflict or in remote communities are more likely to engage with United Nations patrols if women are part of the patrols.

- The inclusion of sexual and gender-based violence within the designation criteria in the sanctions regime has increased pressure on the Government to address sexual and gender-based violence.

- MONUSCO has continued to use gender markers to measure its gender-responsiveness and coordinates with gender focal points in 25 different offices of the Mission. The Mission aims to reach the target of having 34 per cent women among its international staff by the end of 2018 (currently 29 per cent). However, progress is slow and women are a minority on rosters of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and downsizing missions, from which MONUSCO hires most of its civilian personnel. With regard to the uniformed military component of the Mission, only 3.5 per cent are women.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, presented some of the recommendations highlighted in the background brief shared with the participants, and those were complemented by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. The recommendations included:

- Encouraging the Security Council to meet with women's organizations from the capital and conflict-affected provinces during its visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to stress that peaceful and inclusive elections are in the interests of all, and to explore opportunities and obstacles to women's participation in governance and political processes, including support for women candidates on the current electoral lists.

- Supporting regional women's networks, such as the Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, the Regional Women's Forum of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa) and the African Women Leaders Network, to support organizations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo working on issues relating to women and peace and security,

including women's political participation and the implementation of the national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

- Calling upon the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to reinforce efforts to address conflict-related sexual violence, including by providing sufficient support for the implementation of action plans based on the 2013 joint communiqué between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, by continuing to fight against impunity and by scaling up services for survivors. In this regard, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict noted that the sharp increase in conflict-related sexual violence was evident in both scale and the geographic spread of crimes and had resulted in new entities listed in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250). Of the cases verified in the first half of 2018, 30 per cent were perpetrated by members of the security sector and 70 per cent by non-State actors. The Security Council can help to fight against impunity, including by stripping those prosecuted for sexual and gender-based violence of their political legitimacy. The Council's upcoming visit is an opportunity to insist that perpetrators be forbidden from holding elective and appointed offices.

The Co-Chairs closed the meeting, thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, MONUSCO and the country team for their participation, and committed to following up on the recommendations.